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ABSTRACT

The Trans Alaska Oil Pipeline project and accompanying increases in economic wealth have had an enormous impact, particularly on Alaskan women. Prior to pipeline construction, the civilian labor force participation by Alaskan women was close to the national average. During and since pipeline construction, this participation rate has soared. Despite this increase, historical employment patterns persist; Alaskan women are disproportionately working in clerical and service jobs. However, Alaska women are currently pursuing higher education at an accelerating rate. Current statistics from the University of Alaska (Fairbanks) reveal that women comprise not only a higher percentage of total students, but also a higher percentage of graduates. Further statistics reveal a disproportionate concentration of females in the upper and lower age brackets and a birth rate 50 percent above the national average. As a result of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, the approximately 15,000 Native women are just beginning to exert influence beyond their village environment. The many changes in Alaska will bring ever greater numbers of females into the labor force and into the state-wide decision-making process. (KC)

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WOMEN AND RAPID ECONOMIC CHANGE: THE ALASKA CASE*

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*For presentation at the National Association of Economic Educators, Kansas City, Missouri, October 8, 1982

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WOMEN AND RAPID ECONOMIC CHANGE: THE ALASKA CASE

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Any consideration of Alaska, its current rapid rate of economic change and the role of women in that change, must include an awareness of geographical and climatic constraints. (MAP OF ALASKA). Alaska is a state that must be discussed in extremes and with use of superlatives. Spanning four time zones, extending north-south 1,100 miles and east-west 2,000 miles, Alaska is both the most westerly and the most easterly state. (Due to the International Dateline.) It possesses 33,000 miles of coastline and is approximately 1/5 of the total land area of the continental United States, 375 million acres. Encompassing four completely different climatic regions, Alaska weather can flucturate from -70 degrees fahrenheit in winter to 100 degrees fahrenheit in summer. Rainfall varies from less than 6 inches on the Arctic Slope to more than 200 inches in parts of Southeast. Vegetation ranges from lush rain forest to fragile tundra; altitude ranges from sea level to the soaring peak of Denali, the Great One, at 20,320 feet.

From the Russian fur trade to Prudhoe Bay oil, Alaska economic activity has always been characterized by certain features. These include: 1) resource extraction, 2) absentee ownership; 3) lack of processing, 4) seasonality, and since the Gold Rush, 5) high government employment. Until recently, this resulted in boom and bust, with large population and capital movements in and out of the region as resource related projects peaked and ebbed. The military exacerbated this tendency during and after the Second World War. Historically, economic activity in Alaska was the domain of males. The census of 1890 located approximately 7 white females to 100 white males. By 1920, the ratio had risen to only 35 white females to 100 white males. (7) (The Native population was much closer to a 1:1 ratio.) Early census information must be considered very delicately since it was difficult to contact people living beyond roads and all methods of communication, particularly when many chose not to be found.

When Alaska became a state in 1959, it was almost totally dependent on the Federal government for financial assistance. It was also still a male dominated region. The 1960 census showed 75 females to 100 males for all races. (7) In 1967, commercial quantities of oil were discovered by the Richfield Company at Prudhoe Bay on the North Slope of Alaska. The oil find was on land previously selected by

the State of Alaska under provisions of the Statehood Act. (10). In 1969, a lease sale of 412,000 acres at Prudhoe Bay brought $923 million into the State treasury, a staggering sum for a state with a budget that year of only $188 million.(1) The rush to capture elusive riches began with full force. The 1970 census showed 84 females to 100 males for all races, (7) indicating perhaps the beginnings of some family stability in the region, and an increased role by women in the economic development of Alaska.

During 1974-1977, Alaska was impacted by the largest private construction project in the history of the world, an $8 billion pipeline stretching from Prudhoe Bay to Valdez, with an associated $1.4 billion marine terminal at tidewater. At its peak in 1976, more than 30,000 persons were employed directly on the pipeline project, almost 18 percent of the civilian workforce. Fairbanks, the heart of the project, received an injection of more than $800,000 per day from pipeline activity. (6)

Currently, the Trans Alaska Oil Pipeline pumps approximately 1.6 million barrels of oil each day. The State of Alaska received $4 billion in revenues in FY 82, 88 percent from petroleum rents, royalties and taxes. (4) Distributed evenly, each man, woman and child would have received approximately $10,000, up from $650 ten years earlier.

The pipeline project, and accompanying increases in economic wealth, have had enormous impact on Alaska and women in Alaska particularly. Between 1970 and 1980, Alaska's population increased 34%. The number of females increased 38%. The ratio of females to males again increased, to 88 to 100 in 1980. For whites, the ratio was 87 to 100; for Natives, 97 to 100. (7)

Prior to pipeline construction, the civilian labor force participation rate by Alaska women was very close to the national average. (7) (TABLE 1) During and since pipeline construction, this participation rate has soared. In recent years, however, the rate has stabilized and in fact declined slightly in 1981. (2, 9) The 1981 Alaska female participation rate was 16 percent above the national average, down significantly from the 25 percent differential in 1978. There are many possible explanations for the recent lower participation rate: 1) higher unemployment rates are discouraging females from seeking jobs; 2) more women are pursuing higher education; 3) more retired women are remaining in the state; and 4) more women are staying home and, in many cases, having babies.

Despite increases in Alaska women's labor force participation rates, historical employment patterns persist. Alaska women are disproportionately working in clerical and service jobs. (3) Since these jobs tend to be most stable,

unemployment rates among Alaska women have generally been lower than for Alaska men. (2) But both groups have higher unemployment rates than the national average. (9) (TABLE 2). In fact, in only one year since statehood has the total Alaska unemployment rate dropped below the national average. That was in 1975, at the height of pipeline construction activity. High unemployment rates are a negative aspect of living in the state, reflecting seasonality, large numbers of new job seekers from "outside", and erratic fluctuating patterns of construction activity. Unemployment figures do not measure the number of discouraged workers, particularly those located in small rural villages where opportunities of all kinds are extremely limited.

Alaska women are pursuing higher education at an accelerating rate. University of Alaska, Fairbanks statistics show that currently women are comprising not only a higher percentage of total students, but a higher percentage of graduates. (12) (TABLE 3) While UAF is not the only post-secondary institution in Alaska, it is the oldest, and the only residential campus. Therefore, UAF is a mirror of patterns at the three other four-year institutions and 11 other community colleges. More women are part-time students, reflecting their relatively older age and their often increased family responsibilities. Women are beginning to concentrate studies in the professional schools and many are choosing the traditionally

male dominated engineering curriculums. Approximately 1/3 of the Fall 1982 petroleum enginering class at UAF is female.

Females in Alaska are disproportionately concentrated in the upper and lower ages, with the lowest proportion of females in the 35-44 age bracket. (7) More single men than single women migrate to Alaska and the military in Alaska is male dominated, particularly among career service persons. The 1980 census did indicate, however, that a higher proportion of older females were now remaining in the State. In 1970, 6.6 percent of the female population was 55 years of age or older; in 1980, 8.3 percent of the female population was in that age bracket. (7) Reasons for staying in Alaska include improved medical care, expansion of State-supported retirement homes, and increases in the longevity bonus payment.

Females in Alaska are having babies in record numbers. In 1980, the birth rate in Alaska was 50 percent above the national average. In 1970, the differential was 36 percent. The marriage rate was 26 percent higher and the divorce rate was 69 percent higher in 1980, compared to differentials of 6 percent and 60 percent in 1970. (8) Alaska unfortunately also has the highest child abuse rate in the nation. (5) These phenomena indicate a large number of single parent families which places enormous burdens on females as workers

and mothers, perhaps more than elsewhere in the nation because of confining climatic conditions, and lack of extended family support due to large geographic distances.

A large group of women whose potential influence is just beginning to be realized is the approximately 15,000 adult Native females. With the 1971 Native Claims Settlement Act, the Federal government transferred 44 million acres and promised $962.5 million (the State paid $500 million of it) to Native Alaskans, thereby extinguishing all aboriginal rights to land. (11) This Act permitted the establishment of 13 regional Native Corporations, and over 200 village Native Corporations. To date, all regional corporations have had male leadership, some non-Native, but many of the village corporations have chosen females as presidents. Female Natives, whose responsibilities have traditionally included child bearing and protection of cultural heritage, are now being forced out of the village environment into the world of high finance and corporate decision making. Record numbers of these females are in universities across Alaska and the nation; too few are succeeding academically to date. In this group will have to emerge some of the leaders of multi-million dollar corporations holding ownership to 12 percent of Alaska's land base.

Alaska will continue to experience rapid rates of economic change. Petroleum development will accelerate. Recent

finds in the Beaufort Sea, the announced 18 OCS lease sales through 1985, and preliminary mapping of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge will continue to spur economic development and population growth. Possible construction of a $40 billion natural gas pipeline could intensify already feverish construction activity, stimulated by massive State government capital spending and large scale investment in the North Slope oil fields. The military in Alaska, relatively dormant since the late 1960's, will likely expand given the new emphasis on U.S. military superiority. The ultimate transfer of 148.5 million acres of Federal land to the State and Natives will provide a substantial locally controlled land base. (Approximately 100 million acres have been tentatively transferred to date.)

The Alaska female will be in the middle of the action. Higher educational achievement, personal financial needs, feminist expectations and the reality of single parenthood will force ever greater numbers of females into the labor force and the statewide decision-making process. Some of the toughest affirmative action laws in the nation, and the conscious attempt by State government to increase the number of females in high positions, will increase the opportunities for females in every job category. Laudatory attempts by the oil companies to provide professional advancement for women have already become visible. More than anywhere else in the nation, women in Alaska, without

stereo-typed role models and pre-defined cultural standards, will be subjected to pressures and opportunities unlike those available anywhere else. My guess is that Alaska women will continue to be on the frontier, economically, politically, and culturally.

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Table 1. Female Civilian Labor Force Participation Rates U.S. and Alaska, 16 Years+, Various Years

Year	U.S.	Alaskan
1970	41.3%	45.3%
1976	47.3	56.4
1977	48.4	57.1
1978	50.0	62.4
1979	51.5	60.5
1980	51.5	60.6
1981[1]	52.1	60.4

Sources: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census for 1970.
Other years, U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Statistics: Employment and Earnings. Alaska Department of Labor, Various publications.

NOTES: [1]For comparison, the 1981 male participation rate in the U.S. was 77.0%; in Alaska, 82.7%.

Table 2. Unemployment Rates: U.S. and Alaska, 16 Years+, Various Years

Year	U.S.	Alaska
1959	5.5	9.5
1960	5.5	8.0
1961	6.7	9.9
1962	5.5	9.4
1963	5.7	9.3
1964	5.2	8.4
1965	4.5	8.6
1966	3.8	9.0
1967	3.8	8.7
1968	3.6	9.1
1969	3.5	8.7
1970	4.9	8.6
1971	5.9	8.2
1972	5.6	8.3
1973	4.9	8.5
1974	5.6	7.9
1975	8.5	6.9
1976	7.7	8.4
1977	7.0	9.2
1978	6.0	11.0
1979	5.8	9.4
1980	6.6	9.6
1981	7.6	9.3

	Female	Male	Female	Male
1978	7.2	5.2	9.4	12.6
1979	6.8	5.1	7.9	10.1
1980	7.4	6.9	8.8	10.1
1981	7.9	7.4	7.7	10.4

Sources: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. Employment and Earnings. Alaska Department of Labor, Various publications.

Table 3. University of Alaska, Fairbanks, Students and Graduates Various Years

Year	Female	Male	Total	Females % of Total
		Students[1]		
1971	1180	1778	2958	39.9
1972	1331	1827	3158	42.1
1973	1256	1672	2928	42.9
1974	1397	1584	2981	46.9
1975	1161	1336	2497	46.5
1976	1231	1357	2588	47.6
1977	1368	1581	2949	46.4
1978	1532	1735	3267	46.9
1979	1713	1776	3489	49.1
1980	1854	1902	3756	49.4
1981	2031	2084	4115	49.4
		Graduates - Bachelors		
1971	76	121	197	38.6
1972	95	183	278	34.2
1973	104	168	272	38.2
1974	96	167	263	36.5
1975	114	165	279	40.9
1976	85	132	217	39.2
1977	93	119	212	43.9
1978	78	93	171	45.6
1979	75	117	192	39.1
1980	111	119	230	48.3
1981	125	151	276	45.3
		Graduates - Masters		
1971	36	35	71	50.7
1972	25	46	71	35.2
1973	17	70	87	19.5
1974	20	64	84	23.8
1975	27	53	80	33.8
1976	18	48	66	27.3
1977	19	45	64	29.7
1978	18	39	57	31.6
1979	22	51	73	30.0
1980	28	51	79	35.4
1981	41	53	94	43.6

Source: University of Alaska, Fairbanks. Official Statistics, Various years.

NOTES: [1]Does not differentiate between part-time and full-time students.